REVIEW ARTICLE

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EUROPEAN IDENTITY AND TURKEY'S QUEST FOR THE EU MEMBERSHIP

ABSTRACT: In the post-Single European Act period, debates around European identity have intensified, particularly in the context of EU enlargement. The EU's move to being a supranational political entity in the past two decades has caused serious concerns in some sections of the elite and people across the EU member states. While French and Dutch rejections of the constitutional treaty set an important milestone, Turkey's quest for the EU membership has complicated to a great extent controversies on European identity. The reviewed books here contribute to efforts to understand the extent to which European identity and Turkey's bid for the EU membership has entangled. It is more likely to witness debates around both European identity and Turkey's candidacy for the Union for many years to come; therefore, these books will more likely remain relevant for the academic and policy circles.

**Selcen Oner, *Turkey and the European Union: The Question of European Identity* (MD: Lexington Books, 2011).
Senem Aydin-Duzgit, *Constructions of European Identity: Debates and Discourses on Turkey and the EU* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).**

Identity has received an increasing amount of attention in the post-Cold War theory and practice of International Relations (IR). Dominant theories in the field, namely realism, neorealism,

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and neoliberalism, have largely ignored identity in explaining foreign policies of states. After the peaceful collapse of the Cold War, these theories have been severely criticized by alternative explanations, which have attributed great importance to identity. Among these alternatives, constructivism has underlined norms, ideas, culture, and identity while post-structuralism has most emphasized discourse and language. Meanwhile, 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks have further intensified debates around religion and identity in both the policy and academic world. Turkey as a country combining predominantly Muslim population, secular state, and Western legal system earned official candidate status for the EU membership in December 1999, and started the accession negotiations in September 2005. The 9/11 attacks and Turkey's accession negotiations have generated controversial policy debates in the EU member states, especially in those having a large amount of Muslim populations. Particularly notable in this context, questioning Turkey's 'Europeanness' has entangled to a great extent debates around European identity. As Turkey's ongoing quest for joining the EU seems to continue many years if not decades, this entanglement will remain an important topic for both policy debates and academic studies.

Examining the linkage between European identity and Turkey-EU relations, two issues should be highlighted. First, there is no fixed definition of 'European identity', and it is shaped by both bottom up and top down level dynamics.[1] Second, European response to Turkey's membership application at fair, objective grounds will shape at large the construction process of its identity. Among the three books reviewed here, *Turkey and the European Union: The Question of European Identity* and *Constructions of European Identity: Debates and Discourses on Turkey and the EU* bring several insights for in-depth analysis of the link between Turkey's bid for the EU membership and the construction process of European identity.

Turkey and the European Union is composed of three parts/ nineteen chapters in addition to the introductory and conclusion chapters. The first part examines two major issues. The first three chapters here deal with evolution of the idea of Europe and construction of European identity throughout history. Particularly notable, the author underlines that multiple notions of Europe and

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[1] For top down and bottom up conceptions of European identity, see Checkel and Katzenstein 2009, Preface and Introduction.

its boundaries have always been existed, and contested with each other in the past. Chapters 4 to 6 in this part of the book look at European identity in terms of social constructivism. This theory holds that European identity is not a fixed phenomenon, and it is up to change and re-constructions through social interactions. In this sense, a fundamental distinction occurs between constructivist and essentialist notions of collective identity.

The second part examines how the identity of EU has come out over time in the context of civic and cultural understandings of Europe. While the right Members of European Parliament (MEP), the author contends, have mostly cultural basis of European identity, the left MEPs are mostly oriented to civic notions (p. 141). Moreover, the second part includes chapters on the role of EU institutions in the construction of European identity. In this regard, the author argues that the Commission, the Parliament, and the Court of Justice have played the major role in this process. Here, several citations from interviews made with the Commission officials and Parliamentarians also take place. Another important theme in the second part is about the existence of gap between the elites and the general people in terms of support for the EU, and European identity.

The third and last part of the book has chapters in regard to the role of European identity in Turkey-EU relations, the European elites and public views on Turkey's EU membership, compatibility of Islam and European identity, the impact of Turkey-EU relations on the construction of European identity, and the comparison of EU relations with Turkey with the Central and Eastern European (CEE) enlargement countries on the basis of identity debates. In those chapters, the author uses interviews made with the MEPs and the Commission officials in addition to Eurobarometer poll results. A few remarkable arguments could be noted here: (i) Turkey's Europeanness has been widely questioned among the European elites, (ii) Turkey does not have a favorable support level for the EU membership unlike the CEE countries, (iii) the left side of political spectrum gives more support for Turkey's membership as compared to the right, and (iv) perceptions of European identity on the basis of culture, geography and history generate unfavorable attitudes to Turkey's EU membership in contrast to the notion of EU as a political project.

Senem Aydin-Duzgit's work, *Constructions of European Identity*, puts forward a highly critical tone in assessing European discourses on Turkey. In doing so, the book follows post-structuralist theory

by applying the qualitative method of Critical Discourse Analysis. The author argues that political discourse does have a constitutive impact, not a causal relationship, on the making of foreign policy. So, discourse should be taken seriously in order to understand European/EU treatment of Turkish bid for the membership. In examining European discourses on Turkey, the study looks at four ways in which Europe(s) are constructed and Turkey is represented both positively and negatively in each of four ways: Europe as a security community, Europe as an upholder of democratic values, Europe as a political project, and Europe as a cultural project. To lay out these various discourses, the study benefits from a notable primary data: 29 interviews conducted with the MEPs, 19 interviews with officials of the Commission and 36 interviews with the members of parliaments in the three EU member states (France, Germany, and Britain). The interviews were made between October 2006 and September 2008. In addition, it uses the Commission speeches and the European Parliament debates.

In the first realm, Turkey has been considered as a panacea for the clash of civilizations, a strategic asset and a potential security threat for Europe. These views have found supporters across the Commission, Parliament, and the three EU member state parliaments. The author notes that British MPs gives lesser reference to Turkey as a threat as compared to French and German MPs. In the second discourse (Europe as an upholder of democratic values), Turkey has been posed as a statically undemocratic country and a country capable of democratic change. While the right MEPs, French and German MPs have had the first discourse in general, the left MEPs, French and German MPs along with the Commission and British MPs have followed the second, the positive one.

The third discourse involves the portrayal of Europe as a political project, which has elements of well-functioning institutions, solid budget, and pooled sovereignty (p. 99). In this area, the book discusses two representations of Turkey: as a potential political threat and an entity adaptable to the European political project. The threat discourse has mostly been related to Turkey's population and misperception that the country has a monolithic national identity. The discourse of adaptability, the author notes, has found most support among the European Commission and British MPs, who have a notion of EU as a loose political project. The last discourse is about culture, and that raised the most controversy across the EU institutions and the EU member states in regard to Turkey's potential EU membership. On the negative side, Turkey

is considered as a diluter of coherent European cultural space. On the positive side, Turkey's EU membership is taken as an important contribution to cultural diversity in Europe. The author argues that the right MEPs, French and German MPs give support the first line while left-wing and liberal MEPs, French and German MPs, some sections of British MPs, and the Commission do have mostly the latter, positive discourse.

Turkey and the European Union: The Question of European Identity and *Constructions of European Identity: Debates and Discourses on Turkey and the EU* has many similarities. First of all, both of them argue against essentialist notions of European identity by documenting different conceptions of Europe and the EU among the European elites. The existence of multiple views of Europe/EU has then gone hand in hand with various positions taken towards Turkey's bid for the EU membership. Interviews, which were conducted with the EU Commission Officials, the Members of European Parliament, and the Members of the Parliament in the three key EU members (France, Germany and the UK) enable Oner 2011 and Aydin-Duzgit 2012 to have a solid basis for the argument that European identity is not fixed rather it is open to multiple constructions. Second, both books rely on doctoral dissertations written at Marmara University, Istanbul (Oner) and the Free University of Brussels (Aydin-Duzgit). In addition, both studies can be located in similar literatures: identity in IR, European identity, the EU, and Turkey-EU relations. Finally, both works contribute to academic and policy studies in these subject areas.

Despite these similarities, each of the two books has also comparative strengths vis-à-vis another. Aydin-Duzgit conducted more interviews (84) than Oner (29). In addition, Aydin-Duzgit's interview portfolio is more diverse than Oner through the inclusion of interviews with the Members of Parliament in Britain, France and Germany. In terms of other primary data that these books used, Aydin-Duzgit 2012 benefits from debates in national countries and speeches in the European Commission while Oner 2011 does so surveys (*Eurobarometer* and *European Elites Survey*) and a few numbers of statements and declarations. Information about all these primary data can be found in the appendix and bibliography sections of these books. Oner 2011's relative strength over Aydin-Duzgit 2012 stems from its attention to European public opinion with the inclusion of Eurobarometer poll results. Oner uses these surveys to show how European people have views on European identity and Turkey's bid for the EU membership. Therefore, in

contrast to Aydin-Duzgit, 2012, Oner 2011 goes beyond European elite views of European identity and Turkey with the inclusion of European public opinion.

There are three major weaknesses in Oner 2011. First, the study uses social constructivism a driving theoretical framework yet it could have a better discussion of constructivism with regard to identity. Second, the number of interviews could be more (23 MEPs and only 6 European Commission officials) to document better the existence of different notions of European identity across European elites. Third, the book could have a better organization by merging short chapters.[2] For Aydin-Duzgit 2012, one can note its lack of linkage between European elite discourse and public opinion as a major limitation. The author successfully criticizes misperceptions and prejudices that the European elites have in regard to Turkey. However, these elite views cannot be separated from European public images. For example, members of parliament in the EU member states could be responsive to public anxiety towards Turkey so elite views need to be considered in the context of public images. In addition, this book selected three key EU member states for discourse analysis. One can raise a question that if there is any important variation across other twenty-five EU member countries in terms of European identity and views on Turkey's bid for the EU membership. The question could also be an important area for further research.

Despite the above mentioned limitations, *Turkey and the European Union: The Question of European Identity* and *Constructions of European Identity: Debates and Discourses on Turkey and the EU* make important contributions to studies on European/EU identity as well as on Turkey-EU relations. Findings in these books, particularly the existence of various conceptions of Europe and EU within and across the EU institutions and national parliaments of the EU member states give a solid support to notion that European identity is not a fixed phenomenon and open to multiple ways of reconstructions.

In accordance with those variations, there is no single 'European' view of Turkey's bid for the EU membership. An important finding in Aydin-Duzgit 2012 is that British MPs

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[2] The average length of chapters is ten pages; 220-page book is composed nineteen chapters in addition to the introductory and conclusion chapters. Many chapters are long less than ten pages while one chapter (ch. 5) is only two pages.

and the European Commissioners have much more favorable attitudes towards Turkey's bid for the EU membership while the German MPs, French MPs along with the right-wing MEPs follow negative conceptions of Turkey. Moreover, Oner 2011 notes that the 2006 European Elites Survey study showed that 75% of the MEPs from the leftist parties considered Turkey's membership as a 'good thing' while only 24% of the MEPs from the right wing parties followed such a positive view. Different attitudes towards Turkey's membership within the EU institutions and across the right-left political spectrum, as noted in these two books, generate important policy consequences. An important policy implication of these findings for Turkey is that she can attempt to change negative 'European' views on behalf of her prospect of full EU membership although it does not mean that that task is an easy one if one considers cultural conceptions of Europe have strong basis among the Europe's political right.

Unlike the 1999–2004 momentum, Turkey–EU relations have had stagnant nature in the past decade. The Helsinki European Council summit in December 1999 decided for Turkey's official EU candidate status, and then Turkey undertook comprehensive political and economic reforms in order to comply with the Copenhagen criteria. In December 2005, the Copenhagen European Council summit gave a historic decision that Turkey fulfilled the criteria to start the accession negotiations. On October 3 2005, the EU opened the negotiations but the negotiation process has developed very slowly. In the 2005–2015 period, 14 of 35 negotiation chapters opened, only one chapter was provisionally closed, eight chapters were blocked by the European Council (December 2006), five chapters were blocked by France (June 2007; block on one chapter removed in December 2014), and six chapters were blocked by the Republic of Cyprus (December 2009). In the 2009–2015 period, only four chapters were opened for negotiations. A key problem in that stagnancy has been Turkey's rejection of recognizing the government of Cyprus and to open its ports to trade from Cyprus. However, both Turkey and the EU also have had reluctant positions towards each other beyond the decades-long Cyprus conflict. On the Turkish side, the governing Justice and Development Party (ruling since November 2002) has not prioritized the EU accession process in the country's foreign policy agenda although it was very successful to undertake significant political reforms in the 2002–2004 period. On the EU side, Turkey's large population and its proximity to conflict-ridden Middle East have

resulted in serious anxiety across a considerable part of people and political leaders in the EU member countries. Particularly notable, Turkey's Ottoman past and predominantly Muslim population, despite its secular political regime and legal system, have been the key part of that public and elite level European concerns. As a result, identity aspect cannot be separated from reasons behind the ongoing deadlock in the Turkey–EU relations. For this reason, the reviewed books here are very helpful to understand the ongoing deadlock, which seems to continue in years to come.

Persistence of national identities in Europe

Beginning with the Single European Act (SEA) and the Maastricht Treaty, European integration has taken an important departure to move from the customs union to economic and political union in the past three decades. In contrast to the elite driven character of the integration until the SEA, it has become more controversial for people in the EU member countries. This should not be unexpected since the post Maastricht EU has touched more on daily lives of common people, for example, through the use of common currency and free movement of people across national borders (Kaelble 2009, 195). Although people in the EU member states have provided an increasing amount of support for common European policies in many areas, affiliation with national identities have remained more stronger than affiliation with so-called 'European identity'. According to 2010 Eurobarometer survey, only 12.7% of the people in EU countries see themselves primarily as 'European' while 46% of them prefer first national identity and 43% go along with both European and national identities. Eurobarometer and European Value surveys showed that support for European identity at public level has remained quite stable in the 1990s and 2000s despite the fact that European integration has experienced a significant amount of deepening (Fligstein et al 2012, 110; Caporaso and Kim 2008, 25). An important implication of the persistence of national identities in European countries is the existence of widespread Euroscepticism and public concerns towards the enlargement and immigration. In this context, Turkey's prospect for the EU membership has also been an important source of anxiety for people in several EU countries including France, Germany, Netherlands and Austria, where significant populations of Turkish immigrants live.

Turkey has an important disadvantage for being 'radical other' for a large amount people in the EU countries in contrast to the Central and Eastern European countries who joined in the 2004 enlargement. The difference stems from Turkey's history. The Crusades and the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans and the Eastern Europe have shaped the construction of European identity in history (Strath 2002, 391–93; Morozov and Rumelili 2012, 35). As a result, cultural and ethnic images of European identity across the European elites and people generate negative views of Turkey's bid for the EU membership as documented in Aydin-Duzgit 2012 and Oner 2011. Moreover, civic/political conceptions of European identity are relatively more open to multiculturalism in Europe; accordingly, they reproduce more favorable attitudes for Turkey's EU membership. On the other hand, as seen in these two books, there are various conceptions of European identity and Turkey's membership across the EU institutions and national parliaments of the key EU member countries. An important area for further research is to examine other EU member states in regard to how they take on European identity and Turkey. In addition, another research needs to be undertaken to assess if there is any notable difference in affiliations with European identity and attitudes towards Turkey's EU membership over time.

A common theme in Aydin-Duzgit 2012 and Oner 2011 is the existence of various conceptions of European identity. As suggested before, national identities have remained quite powerful while European integration has experienced unprecedented levels of deepening after the SEA and Maastricht Treaty. Then, one needs to examine the way in which European identity has been shaped and constructed. In this regard, two major dynamics should be noticed: top down and bottom up constructions of European identity (Checkel and Katzenstein 2009, xi). On the one hand, the EU institutions and the key EU leaders have shaped it through institutional mechanisms, official documents and policies. For example, the 1973 Copenhagen Declaration employed first time 'European identity' in the EU history while the Maastricht Treaty put forward 'European citizenship'. The European Commission organizes programs to raise awareness of European identity, especially among young people. At the national level, political leaders including the members of parliaments in the EU countries can shape public discourse with their own images of European identity. In this regard, findings from the elite interviews made by Aydin-Duzgit and Oner are very helpful to see how the political elite

have varying views of European identity. On the other hand, bottom up side for the construction of European identity has been largely missed in these works. Immigration, 'war on terror', and economic crises have been the key dynamics to shape public attitudes towards national and European identities in the 2000s and 2010s (Fligstein et al 2012, 107). The 2014–2015 migrant crisis, the Al Qaeda and the ISIS terrorist attacks in multiple European cities, the long-standing European financial crisis have influenced to a great extent public consciousness of self-other relations in regard to the way how they consider Muslim immigrants/refugees in their home countries and Turkey's bid for the EU membership. Henceforth, the political elite, unexpectedly, should have been responsive to public anxiety with the Muslim migrants and Turkey's prospect for the EU membership. One could expect that increasing amount of Muslim migrants, rising levels of unemployment due to financial crises, and continuing terrorist attacks in European cities would create backlash among European populations towards Muslims and prospects for Turkey's EU membership. Accordingly, the political elite in the EU member countries would have more negative views for Turkey's accession into the EU.

Conclusion

The post-Single European Treaty (1986–87) period has witnessed unprecedented level of deepening for European integration. The European Community was transformed into the Union with the Maastricht Treaty, and the ensuing European Treaties (Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon) gave impetus for the realization of political union. Yet, the failed Constitutional Treaty demonstrated that the European project has stayed short of a fully supranational or federal entity. The Union has had some supranational features, particularly with the European Court of Justice rulings over the national courts in some issue areas. In addition, the Union has now twenty eight member states while it had only twelve members in 1986. In other words, the European integration project has witnessed both extraordinary levels of deepening and widening in the past three decades. However, as suggested above, affiliations with national identities in the EU member countries have continued to remain strong while preference of 'European identity' as the primary point of affiliation has only stayed at around 12%. Turkey's bid for the EU

membership in that context, then, has resulted in important levels of concerns across the European political elites and people in the EU member countries. The issue was at an important part of the constitutional referendum debates in France and Netherlands. As the reviewed books in this article have documented, the EU elite and politicians in the three key EU members (Germany, France and the UK) do not hold same conceptions of European identity and Turkey's membership; rather, various orientations exist in that area. In other EU member states, further studies could find a similar variation across different political parties.

Turkey's prospect of EU membership in the near future does not seem very good. The Cyprus conflict, the enlargement fatigue, Turkey's large population could be considered as important factors for that low prospect. Yet, political will on both the Turkish and the European side should also be suggested as a key part of this process. In this regard, Turkey's unique identity in contrast to the 2004, 2007 and 2013 enlargement countries has also affected the ongoing deadlock between Turkey and the EU. Identity issue seems to remain a key part of Turkey-EU relations. The reviewed books here make an important contribution to understand various positions and discourses around European identity, and then the implications of that multiplicity on taking positions for and against Turkey's EU membership.

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